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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that, while Kenneth Burke may be placed by some writers squarely in either the modern or the postmodern tradition, Burke participates in both but is marginal to each, and thus "beyond" them. The first section briefly traces the outline of Burke's philosophy of rhetoric. With that framework as a backdrop, the second section examines Burke's relationship to the modernist movements in aesthetics and criticism, and the third section examines his relationship to the postmodern movements. The final section suggests that "Burkology" is containable by neither and that it offers a "corrective" to both modernism and postmodernism. Twenty-six references are attached. (SR)

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KENNETH BURKE'S PHILOSOPHY OF RHETORIC: MODERN, POSTMODERN, AND BEYOND

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Paper presented at 80th Annual Meeting,
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Kenneth Burke as Aristotelian or neo-Circeronian; Kenneth Burke as "new critic" or as "aesthete;" Kenneth Burke as Marxist or Freudian; or, more recently, Burke as an anticipator of post-modernism and post-structuralism: all of these are common characterizations of Burke familiar to those who have devoted much attention to the readers of his work. It should seem apparent that Burke's works are not readily classifiable, nor is his orientation amenable to comfortable and stable sublation into a critical school or intellectual movement. This is why, despairing of the prospects for placement, Stanley Edgar Hyman merely refers to Burke's field as "Burkology" (359), although, as I will argue in a few minutes, Hyman himself situates Burke clearly in the "modernist" tradition. But given that Burke is often understood as a representative of one intellectual current or another, it is important to look at the relationship between "Burkology" and other modes of thinking. The objective is not to reduce Burke's orientation to fit with any other mode but rather, taking a lead from Burke himself, to examine Burkology as both the same as and different from other approaches. In "The Tactics of Motivation," Burke writes not of critical approaches <u>per se</u> but of academic disciplines; however, the point would seem to be much the same:

> But if one offered a synthesis of the fields covered by the various disciplines, which of the disciplines could possibly be competent to evaluate it? Where each specialty gets its worth is precisely by moving

> towards diversity, how could any specialty possibly deal with a project that offered a unification among the diversities? Or, otherwise put: if one were to write on the interrelatedness among ten specialties, one would be discussing something that lay outside the jurisdiction of them all (as quoted in Hyman, 360).

That which is in each field but also necessarily apart from them all I take to be "rhetoric." And it is Kenneth Burke's philosophy of rhetoric which constitutes not only the encompassing qualities of "Burkology" but also the instability of that encompassment and which, consequently, facilitates both the easy appropriatation of Burke's theories by other intellectual orientations and the stubborn recalcitrance of Burke's insights to go quietly into the good night of total sublation.

This paper will briefly trace the outline of what I take to be Burke's philosophy of rhetoric. With that framework as a backdrop, I will then examine Burke's relationship to both the "modernist" and "postmodernist" movements in aesthetics and criticism, suggesting ultimately that "Burkology" is containable by neither, that in being both "inside" and "outside" of both modernism and postmodernism "Burkology" is beyond either.

I.

In the introduction to A Rhetoric of Motives (1950), Kenneth Burke writes that while he is interested in "how rhetorical analysis throws light on literary texts and human relations generally," his interest "above all else" has been "to write a 'philosophy of rhetoric'" (xiv-xv). Yet such a philosophy of rhetoric has not been articulated by Burke, at least not overtly. The purpose of the following section is to weave together from Burke's disparate rhetorical analyses and theoretical speculations about rhetoric an account of his philosophy of rhetoric. Given the limitations of time and space, this account will of necessity be more suggestive than definitive, more summation than explication.

Central to the current endeavor is the approach taken to the term "philosophy." Rather than seek a static -- let alone "true" -- definition for that term, I will attempt to let a meaning unfold from within Burke's works. However, it should be noted at the outset that Burke's approach is one that will not please a great many philosophers, for Burke's objective seems not to be to locate a philosophic ground for rhetoric, a bedrock of some sort external to the functionings of rhetoric, but rather to find a "philosophy" within rhetorical processes, to develop a rhetorical philosophy. While a phrase like "rhetorical philosophy" might sound paradoxical and hence nonsensical to many philosophers (who, following Plato, would

brand such phrases as the height of sophistry), it nonetheless points toward Burke's conclusions. It fact, it points toward Burke's conclusions by virtue of its oxymoronic overtones, for Burke's rhetorical philosophy is one founded by and inseparable from irreducible paradox. Substance, for Burke, is always dialectical (A Grammar, 1945: 33-35).

In pursuing Burke's philosophy of rhetoric, many questions arise, questions regarding the epistemology, ontology, methodology, axiology, and etcetera-ologies of his philosophy. Those questions cannot all be addressed at this time. In order to facilitate this examination of Burke's philosophy of rhetoric in relation to the critical movements associated with modernism and postmodernism, it is minimally necessary to address the question of ontology -- the question of being, of the human subject -- to recognize at least one important part of Burke's similarities with and differences from both modernism and postmodernism. Thus, although my sketch of what I take to be Burke's philosophy of rhetoric will of necessity be of somewhat wider scope, it will nonetheless concentrate on the question of ontology.

Burke begins his life as a critic in the clearly modernist tradition of aestheticism, most notably during his time working at The Dial. During this period, Burke seems primarily to focus on aesthetic form -- he first offers his influential definition of form as the "psychology of the audience," as the arousal and

satisfying of audience expectations, in 1925 in the pages of The Dial -- and he relegates "rhetoric" to a status as a technique by which form operates. As became clear in a heated exchange with Granville Hicks over the aesthetics and ethics of Counter-Statement, Burke was vulnerable to the charge that his approach to aesthetics was concerned with the technical question of how a literary work produced effects on the audience rather than a concern with the ethical or political merits of the effects produced. Burke volleyed with Hicks, contending that an aesthetic theory contains within it an ethical and political program, although he was willing to concede that his primary interest was in the technical question of how effects were produced. This rather theoretical, ethereal exchange between Burke and Hicks could occur throughout the winter and spring of 1930, both in the pages of The New Republic and through private correspondence, but as the Depression worsened the stakes in the debate shifted as well, and ethereal conversations were compelled to transform themselves into conversations about material conditions. Art and criticism could no longer content themselves with how effects are produced; brute circumstances obliged writers to be concerned with what effects were produced. As Burke pursued this latter concern, his focus shifted from rhetoric as technique to rhetoric as propaganda. His own efforts at propaganda -- the failed speech before the 1935 American Writers Congress, which ironically touted a theory of propaganda itself -- may have spurred his evident dissatisfaction with the traditional conception of rhetoric as a

means of persuasion. Whatever his own motivation, it soon becomes clear that in his study of human "motives" Burke has supplemented the traditional orientation to rhetoric, and supplemented it in such as fashion as to craft the framework for a philosophy of rhetoric.

Declaring that motives are <u>in</u> language, Burke scrutinizes the structure and functioning of language itself. As I have attempted to suggest elsewhere (1989), Burke views language as fundamentally dialectical, as not a duplicature of nature but as duplicitous of nature. That is, language perfects and transcends the realm of nature; it adds to nature the realm of morality and "story," and it cannot in any simple way "refer to" or, more specifically, "represent" nature, yet it can never fully extract itself from its own embeddedness in a natural world. The realm of language, and the linguistic motives concomitant to it, is inaugurated by the negative, which functions to suggest what an abstraction may be by virtue of what it is not. Thus, discriminations and distinctions arise, and with them comes meaning itself. This process is perhaps never more evident, although somewhat -- and appropriately -- ironically, than in the very process of perfection or purification. What Burke calls the <u>entelechial</u> impulse in language propels linguistic categories toward their own perfection, toward what post-structuralism would call the totalization of their own self-presence. When a linguistic category reaches perfection, when it is enacted as the

end-of-the-line, the negative is silenced: the perfected concept simply is what it is: transcendent, essential, mystical, pure. However, for Burke, at precisely the moment of such purification, the category transforms and becomes something else, something other: in Derridean terms, it supplements itself. Thus, pure self is loss of self; pure action becomes motion, etc. In other words, even with the pure silencing of the negative in the perfection of a category, the negative -- or difference -- is reinscribed in the otherness of transformation. The work of language is then the work of difference itself, and for Burke difference is necessarily the work of dialectic.

Although the dialectical structure of language gives rise to a myriad of distinctions and discriminations, they are not significant to human agents until they become identified with, until a human subject inhabits a linguistic distinction, thereby achieving identification with it, identifying the world through it, and ultimately becoming identified by it. Identification, that is, brings with it both knowledge and identity -- although each of these concepts must be defined dramatistically. To say that they "must be defined dramatistically" may itself require further definition.

Drama, Burke says to the utter bewilderment of many of his readers, is meant as a literal, not metaphorical, description of the human condition. I believe that the above discussion of

dialectic and identification provides a clue to reading Burke's statement in a significant manner. That is, through dialectic language creates difference, and through thorough application of dialectical methods difference becomes antithesis. The inhabitation of a dialectic -- the literal moving into it by a human agent via the psychological processes of identification -- enacts differences; it brings to life the agon of dialectical distinction. And the enactment of an agon is, definitionally, literally, drama.

"Knowledge," conceived of dramatistically arises not simply dialectically, and not purely dialogically; rather, knowledge arises from the reciprocity of dialectical exchange as goaded by the agons of difference. Knowledge, in this sense, becomes a knowledge of the dialectic, and hence it transcends the dialectic even while always being conditioned and limited by that very dialectic. Burke writes, "Stated broadly the dialectical (agonistic) approach to knowledge is through the **act** of assertion, whereby one 'suffers' the kind of knowledge that is the reciprocal of his act" (A Grammar, 38). The enacted dialectic constitutes an agonistic, dramatistic reciprocal interaction in which one "suffers" the counter-assertions of another by inhabiting those assertions, by -- in Mead's terminology -- taking the role of the other. Through such reciprocal enactments comes transformation or transcendence. Burke writes, "And when the agent is enabled to see in terms of this counter-assertion, he has transcended the state that

characterized him at the start" (A Grammar, 38). In this transcendence is knowledge as it is conceived of dramatistically: knowledge is not just dialectical distinction; rather, it is in the dramatic -- and reciprocal -- enactment of those distinctions.

This distinction between drama and dialectic might be more clear if examined from an altered angle. One locus of the difference between dialectic and drama is in Burke's treatment of the negative. The "scientistic" negative is the "it is not," while the dramatistic negative is the "thou shalt not." The difference between these two negatives is not purely one of representativeness of nature (for no negative exists in nature); rather it is one of the moralizing which comes with enactment, or with the admonition of a specific enactment. This "scientistic" negative is static and passive; the hortatorical or dramatistic negative is dynamic and active.

Drama as the literal enactment of dialectical differences has profound implications for a re-conceptualization of the human being. Burke's approach seems heavily influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead; that is, individual identity is created through social interactions, and for Burke these social interactions, as seen above, involve the linguistically conditioned reciprocity of the symbolic act. In Burke's lexicon, "identification" becomes the psychologized rhetoric which constitutes and continually reconstitutes a given human

identity. That is, through identification we found the various "me's" which, in their summation, constitute our expressable "personalities." "Personality," writes Burke, "is a dramatistic concept" in that it is "derived from a word referring to a man's role" (A Grammar, 470).[1]

While the individual personality develops through various identifications engendered by social interaction, the processes identified in dramatism make possible broader ontological assertions. Specifically, humans are, says Burke, "bodies that learn language." This definition suggests not only the dualism between phsyiological and symbolic realms of motivation but also the antinomies of substance in language, the dialectical and paradoxical "molten core" which inaugurates difference and hence meaning. I have called this Burke's "ontological loop" (1989) because it becomes a self-authenticating construction which privileges human ontology in general and thereby "grounds" the security of a human being as well. It is in this ontological loop that Burke's theory of rhetoric becomes explicitly a philosophy of rhetoric -- or, more precisely, given not only its philosophically problematic "grounding" in a "molten core" of ambiguity and transformation but also its rhetorically strategic self-reflexive, hence self-authenticating, tautological structure, it is in this ontological loop that Burke's theory of rhetoric becomes a rhetorical philosophy.

Burke's changes in the early 1930s had profound implications on the later development of his theory of dramatism. The transformations in Burke's theorizing may be charted in the following manner: from a focus on techniques of form to a concern with the "propagandistic" value and functions of form to an integration of those concerns in a "philosophic" stance. This transformation may be observed directly through the progression in Burke's understanding of "rhetoric": from rhetoric as technique to rhetoric as persuasion to rhetoric as identification.[2] By the end of the progression, rhetoric has become the psychological mucilage which binds together the dualisms of the "body that learns language;" the rhetorical processes of identification provide an ontological basis for Dramatism and its implicit ethical, and hence political, program. From his efforts to construct a philosophy of aesthetics, Burke is led by the implications of his own terms, by their formal qualities, toward a rhetorical philosophy. How, then, does Burke's "philsophy of rhetoric" relate to the tradition of modernism and the birth of postmodernism?

II.

The use of the terms "modern" and "postmodern" is of course problematic. "Modernism" covers a lot of intellectual turf, ranging from the new rationalism of the Enlightenment, through Jonathan Swift's foil for the superior Ancients in "The Battle

of the Books," to "modern" movements in art, literature, and criticism. It may be as seemingly innocuous as a synonym for "contemporary" or as clearly ideological as a synonym for "progressive" or "improved" (R. Williams, 174). Often, it may combine these senses in the connotation that what is recent is, naturally, the most improved, and in this usage an explicit definition of "modern" is typically not offered: it is assumed and hence absent. For instance, Liberman and Foster's A Modern Lexicon of Literary Terms (1968) includes many literary terms -- including "new criticism," "semantics," "myth criticism," and "linguistics," terms which are often associated with the modernist project -- but it does not include "modern" itself.

The sense of "modern" to which I wish to place Burke in relation is one offered by Stanley Edgar Hyman in The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism (1955). The first purpose of the volume, Hyman tells us, is "to study the nature of modern critical method" (viii). In his use of the term "modern," Hyman is very deliberate: he means much more than simply "contemporary," and if his usage implies "improved," it does so in a very specific and limited manner. "A good deal of criticism," Hyman maintains, "is contemporary without being modern" in his sense of the term (4). Moreover, although he does maintain that "modern" critical writing is "beyond all earlier criticism in our language," he hastily adds,

"but we cannot flatter ourselves that the superiority lies in the caliber of our critics as opposed to their predecessors. Clearly, it lies in their methods" (5).

Hyman's linkage of modern insights to modern methods -- or, indeed, methods at all -- is a telling move, for it embeds the modern in the scientific modes of thinking: systematic, coherent, often causal, and always methodological. The intrusion of method produced an historical rupture of sorts which gave rise to the modern period. Hyman writes,

> Whether you call it the "new" criticism, as many have, or "scientific criticism," or "working criticism," or, as this book does, "modern criticism," its only relation to the great criticism of the past seems to be one of descent. Its practitioners . . . are doing something radically different with literature, and they are getting something radically different from literature in return (3).

The ineradicable difference between modern literary criticism and traditional criticism, according to Hyman, is the modernist move toward a "meta-criticism," although Hyman does not use that term, toward a criticism which is "grounded" theoretically in something outside of the text that orients one methodologically toward the text. Hyman writes,

> What modern criticism is could be defined crudely and somewhat inaccurately as **the organized use of non-literary techniques and bodies of knowledge to obtain insights into literature.** The tools are these methods or "techniques," . . . . The non-literary techniques are things like psychoanalytic associations or semantic translations. . . . And all of these result in a kind of close reading and detailed attention to the text that can only be understood on the analogy of microscopic analysis.
>
> The key word of this definition is "organized" (3) (emphasis in original).

Lest one be concerned that in his definition -- "the organized use of non-literary techniques" -- Hyman may seem to exclude "new" criticism, with its organic approach to the text, from the "modern" tradition, let me hasten to note that the scientific, organized coherence of non-literary techniques are quickly imitated within literary techniques proper (and by the "new critics"!). Hyman adds, "Besides these [non-literary] bodies of theory and knowledge, modern criticism has developed a number of specialized procedures of its own and methodized them, sometimes on the analogy of scientific procedure" (6).

"New criticism," as it developed in this country, may well exemplify the "modern" tendencies in criticism. New Criticism

is centered about the belief that a work of literature is a unified whole, a completed text unto itself. That core assumption then guides the critical practices of dedicated New Critics, and the subsequent trademarks of New Criticism such as the "intentional fallacy" or the rigorous textual pursuit of unifying patterns or structures radiate like spokes from the "hub" tenet. Edward Wasiolek, in his "Introduction" to Doubrovsky's study of the "critical war" that raged in France during the late nineteen-sixties between Barthes and Picard and their respective "allies," observes that the "sacredness of the text" was the core tenet of American New Critics, even for those who in other respects "opposed the movement or deviated from it" (and he counts Burke as among that group). Wasiolek writes, "There were many movements during the years 1930-1960, but they diverged like spokes from a hub, and what brought them together was a common and unquestioned assumption that critical discourse was commentary about, and measured by, an objective text" (6). Wasiolek similarly finds a unifying core principle in the concept of poetic language--"the 'poeticity' of poetry or the 'literariness' of literature"--which in some senses binds together three otherwise diverse critical movements, American New Criticism, French New Criticism, and Russian Formalism (12). The point, however, is not so much that these three movements are instantiations of the same motivating core, or even that New Criticism is unified in its privileging of a "sacred text;" rather, the point is that modern criticism in general, like academic disiplines, is characterized by certain

core or central tenets which govern methodologically -- and somewhat autocratically -- its practices.

The linkage between modern and concepts such as "organized," "methodological," and "coherent" contains one other implication which needs to be made explicit: in the coherence of the modern world view lies the necessity of structure, and implicit in the concept of structure, as Derrida has made clear, lies the necessity of a center. Derrida writes,

> . . . up until the event I wish to mark out and define [presumably the post-structural de-nucleation of the structural core], structure -- or rather the structurality of structure -- . . . has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure -- but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the **free-play** of the structure. No doubt that by orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the free-play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself (247-248) (emphasis in original).

The at least implicit center supports and makes possible the coherent structure which orders and organizes the modernist world. Some writers make that linkage fairly explicit. For instance, George Rochberg has suggested that "a unique characteristic of modernism" is "the domination of the reductive, single idea in both the intellectual culture and the artistic culture. Of course, there is no single 'single idea' anywhere; rather, there are many single ideas contending for attention and domination" (320). The "single idea" centers each coherent worldview -- and each such centered, coherent structure is by definition "modern" in its orientation.

In addition to its often being characterized "as the application to all realms of human life" the "forms of structural rationalization," modernism may suggest as well a privileged autonomy for the human subject. Rochberg continues, albeit in a depreciating tone, "And still others have viewed modernism as a condition of freedom within which the individual can be himself, unfettered and uninhibited, released from the drag of superego and conscience, a separate entity of being, unanswerable to others whether in the form of individuals or society as a whole" (318). The existence -- and potential autonomy -- of being, of the human subject, is itself central to much modernist thinking. It is in the privileging of the artist as subject, for instance, that both Gustave Flaubert and Marcel Proust are classified as modernist writers (Barthes, 2). To

invoke the already cited passage from "Structure, Sign, and Play," each structure must have a center which functions as "a point of presence." In modern metaphysics, abstract truths may be seen functioning as points of presence, totalizing and dominating the horizon of meaning seen within that orientation; in virtually all variants of modernism, "being" -- whether it itself is centered in "consciousness," "self," "subjectivity," or "stimulous-response" -- functions as a point of presence.

This sketch of what I take to be "modern" in the world of critical theory has depicted modernism as a mode of thinking which is coherent, organized, structured, and centered, and its own center typically priviliges the autonomous human <u>being</u>. Many writers have viewed the thinking of Kenneth Burke as fitting within this modernist tradition. Ranging from the varied interpretations of Burke as a New Critic, as a psychological critic, or as a Marxist critic, through to more recent interpretations of him as a "philosopher of being" in a broadly metaphysical sense (Southwell), readers of Burke have continued to place him as within the movement of modernism. Perhaps the best illustration of this is Stanley Edgar Hyman's selection of Burke as an exemplar of "modern criticism."

Hyman's modernist appropriation of Burke is clear in his citation of the already quoted passage from "The Tactics of Motivation" suggesting that a synthesis of academic fields would "lay outside the jurisdiction of them all," and thus each would be unable "to evaluate" the "synthesis" competently. Hyman

follows this citation with the comment, "The lifelong aim of Burke's criticism has been precisely this synthesis, the unification of every discipline and body of knowledge that could throw light on literature into one consistent critical frame" (360). Hyman's interpretation responds to a "modern" impulse toward order and structure, and thus he reads "Burkology" as an effort at encompassment, at synthesis, at unification. "Like Bacon," he writes, "Burke has set out to do no less than to integrate all man's knowledge into one workable critical frame" (361). This situates Burke clearly in the modernist camp -- and certainly "Burkology" participates in the modernist movement (just as post-structuralism must participate in structuralism, for without the latter the former would not exist), but is modernism capable of "evaluating" or even apprehending "Burkology"? To the extent that it fails to recognize the absence of Burke's "synthesis" -- its necessary non-incorporation, its non-totalization or sublation, into any of the parts it would synthesize into a whole (hence suggesting that the relationship is more metonymic than synecdochic) -- it offers only a partial reading of Burke's theorizing.

III.

The "problem of Kenneth Burke," to borrow William Cain's phrase (1984), seems to be both his recognized importance and

his marginal status: he seems to be both central to discussions of modern and postmodern critical theory and, ironically, distanced from, or marginal to, those very discussions. Thus, while Hyman categorizes him as a modernist, Burke's persistent pandering to paradox destabilizes the "coherence" of his vision, leading toward the "dissolution of drama" itself, and his "grounding" of "being" in that lovely oxymoronic "molten core" of linguistic -- and personal -- transformation further removes Burke from the camp of "pure" modernism. Perhaps the uneasiness of the fit between Burke's thinking and mainstream modernism helps to explain why, despite occasional treatments of Burke such as in Hyman's The Armed Vision, his work traditionally has been viewed with suspicion by the literary establishment.

Although his star is now on the rise even within the area of "literary studies," it may be simply because Burke can be read as a precursor to contemporary post-structural and postmodern criticism. Wayne Booth, for instance, maintains that while he would "not want to claim that Burke foreknew everything that Barthes, Derrida, de Man et cie have shocked the academic world with," he does believe that if "the continental deontologizers and deconstructionists and their American cousins" ever "get around to reading" Burke, they "will be tempted to moderate their claims to originality" (108 n10). Similarly, William Rueckert, perhaps the most thorough chronicler of Burke's works, laments, "Contemporary European critics, especially the French, hardly know who Burke is, though

he has been doing many of the same things they have for more years than most of them and often with equal brilliance" (234). Or, Samuel Southwell begins his recent study of Burke and Martin Heidegger with a by now familiar rehearsal of Burke's "anticipation" of postmodernism:

> Most of what has occurred in the explosive development of critical theory in recent decades has been anticipated and often quite fully developed in the work of one man, Kenneth Burke. A revised Marxism, a revised Freudianism, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, reader-response theory, theory of ritual, speech-act theory, even a kind of deconstructionism, and much else that is called postmodernism -- it is all to be found in Burke, however improbable such an accomplishment may seem (1).

To say that Burke "anticipates" the postmodern is, at this point, to say little, for what is meant by "postmodern"? This query presents an ineradicable enigma: to "capture" postmodernism within a clear definition may well be to proceed in a manner antithetical to the postmodern spirit. Thus, while I despair at the question of definition for "postmodernism," I will proceed in this section by offering a few descriptions of the postmodern spirit, quickly narrowing that to a consideration of post-structuralism and deconstruction,[3] and finally suggesting Burke's relation to deconstruction and, ultimately, postmodernism.

Whereas the modern seeks coherence, organization, and a privileged human subject, the postmodern regales itself with what I am calling an "aesthetic of chaos." I perceive a bit of an oxymoron in this phrase -- for aestheticism typically implies a modernist preoccupation with form while chaos suggests the absence of any form, of any regularity. In binding those seeming contraries together in the oxymoron of the "aesthetics of chaos" I hope to depict, if not define, postmodernism. Lyotard points in this direction:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what **will have been done. . . . Post modern** would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo) (81). (emphasis in original)

Lyotard places the dialectic between artistic freedom and critical regulation, between form and chaos, on a temporal axis; even so, its constitutive element is that dialectic: chaos

requires regimentation, just as coherence requires disintegration, just as structure requires deconstruction.

Burke advanced much the same perspective over fifty years ago as he considered not the movement of postmodernism but rather the movement of Dadism and, a bit more recently, surrealism. Burke reminds us that the move toward perfection of a given dialectical structure coterminously produces a counter-movement ("coterminously" because each is infused with, and in that sense dependent on, the other). Thus, the counter-movement to rationality is not randomness but rather incongruity. Incongruity, as a violation of ordered structures, depends upon rational order itself; without rationality there could be no incongruity, and vice versa. If propositional "argument" is understood as participating in, following the rules of, a given rational structure, then an aesthetic "criticism" of such argumentation would consist of displaying the incongruities coterminous with it. And the more representational ("naturalistic") the aesthetic of ideology, the more fractured and distorted becomes the critical aesthetic. It is in this context that Dadaism and Surrealism may be read as aesthetic criticisms of both ideological argument proper as well as the representational aesthetic of ideology. In "Dada, Dead or Alive" (1925) Burke writes, "W.C. Brownell, in The Genius of Style, points out that when the command 'as you were' is given, the regiment falls out of line and style ceases. Obviously, this is where Dada begins. Which is to say, Dada is the result

of neither regimentation nor chaos, but of pronounced regimentation coexisting with pronounced chaos" (24). This leads Burke to his definition of Dadaism: "Dada is perception without obsession" (24). As Dadaism fades into the Surrealism of the 1930s, its critical function retains much of its currency. Surrealism is, in Burke's terms, "a cult of incongruity" (1973, 61). And, of course, there is a non-obsessive perspective to be gained by such incongruity.

Postmodernism, then, may be interpreted as the moment of paradox in the dialectic between regimentation and chaos, and in Lyotard that dialectic is clearly over time (it should be noted in passing that the temporal dimensions of Burke's concept of "form" invite comparision which Lyotard's "paradox of the future"). As the postmodern impulse spills over from philosophy and aesthetic theory into so-called popular culture, it takes on a sense of the "whacky," which can only be understood not simply as a rupture of traditional, modern aesthetic containments but also by virtue of those very containments themselves. Lewis Lapham, a not particularly postmodern critic, offers some representative characterizations of postmodernism in popular culture.

Lapham maintains that the postmodern is the "realm of the hybred sensibility" (12). It revels in reversals, transformed repetitions, fractured representations, and playful paradox. It is, in Lapham's terms, "collage and sardonic juxtaposition"

(12). In describing what he clearly perceives to be the haughtiness and gamesmanship of postmodern critics, Lapham writes,

> The triumph of the critical method they defined by their playfulness, their eclecticism, their belief in the supremacy of metaphor, and the refinement of their sense of irony. Irony served them both as a weapon and a refuge. If anybody questioned their motives, or, God forbid, classified them as fools, they could smile knowingly and point out, with an air of professional condescension, that they were only kidding. Nothing was serious, because everything was a remake of something else (14).

Although Lapham is clearly not sympathetic to the postmodern impulse, his comments are significant because they point toward the maintenance even in the popularization and commercialization of postmodernism of the dialectic not only between regimentation and chaos but also between past and the present that will have been: everything is a remake of something else, a remake which can be certified as coherent only after it has been enacted.

The postmodern impulse permeates popular culture. It can "be applied as freely as paint to any cultural surface not otherwise marked for exhibition in the Louvre or in one of Donald Trump's hotels" (Lapham, 12). We thus have

postmodern art, postmodern advertising, postmodern television, postmodern presidencies, postmodern criticism, etc. Lapham comments, "Precisely the same attitudes and techniques inform the work of deconstructionist literary critics, advertising copywriters, and producers of television news" (14). The movement of postmodernism is clearly wide-ranging; however, I want to focus on one avenue suggested by Lapham: deconstruction as postmodern literary criticism, and I want to suggest how, in many significant ways, Burke "anticipated" deconstruction.

Indeed, one likely explanation for Burke's recent surge in popularity may be that his writings can be read as an American, a "domestic," foreshadowing deconstruction. While deconstruction has through the years gained a great many American advocates, the possible use of Burke's perspective as a homegrown precursor to deconstruction structures the question of "domestication" a bit differently than it is often cast. That is, while the so-called "Yale School" could have been said to "domesticate" Derridean notions, they did so by appropriating and translating ideas from Derrida not by virtue of already having had what could be construed as "Derridean perspectives." In fact, there is reason to believe that the "Yale Critics" (Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, and, to a far lesser extent, Harold Bloom) all underwent significant shifts in their respective theoretical positions as a result of Derridean influence, although there is some disagreement as to whether their "theoretical revisionism" resulted from an "acceptance of

ideas current in Continental criticism" or whether it was "intended to ward off the threat of a more radical critique of literature" (Martin, xxviii). Or, perhaps, both.

Even as they have been influenced by Derrida -- or, as Wallace Martin suggests, perhaps "infected" by Derridean ideas is more appropriate wording -- the Yale critics have not been loyal acolytes: "They have viewed him not as a lodestar or harbor light, but as a channel-marker near which they might founder" (xxv). And certainly there are substantial differences among the Yale critics as to their respective allegiance to deconstructive principles (or perhaps in their respective submersion in deconstructive waters); In the preface to Deconstruction and Criticism, for instance, Geoffrey Hartman categorizes de Man and Miller with Derrida as "boa-deconstructors" while demurely suggesting that "Bloom and Hartman are barely deconstructionists." "They even write against it on occasion," he adds (ix). In view of the differences among the Yale critics, Martin concludes, "no one acquainted with their writings could think of them as a group" (xxx). Nonetheless, opponents to deconstruction have tended to group the Yale critics together as domestic deconstructors, perhaps revealing their own lack of familiarity with the differences among them, or perhaps revealing the dramatic transformation of difference into antithesis which Burke discusses. The obvious similarity among the Yale critics -- the fact that "language has come to occupy a place that all but de

Man had denied it in their earlier theories" (Martin, xxix) -- may, somewhat ironically, account for both the ability of opponents to group them together as a unified critical "school" and for sympathetic critics to find in them domesticated and de-fanged versions of Derridean insights, thereby contributing both to the heightened opposition to and the increased popularity of deconstruction. In any event, the Yale critics, whatever their appropriations from deconstruction, clearly were not precursors to it.

The Yale critics may, collectively or singularly, founder in deconstruction; they cannot, however, be construed as founders of, as domestic "origins" for, deconstruction. The popularizers of deconstructive thinking in America, ranging from apostles to apologists, have had to search elsewhere for an indigenous critical tradition of which deconstruction might be interpreted as but a postmodern off-shoot. This search has led some to look at Burke as an American forerunner to Derrida.

Readings of deconstruction through Burke--at least through particular versions of Burke--may lead to a domestication of deconstruction as merely a new variant of the sort of close textual reading generally associated with the New Critics and as oddly reminiscent of Burke's dense yet playful style. In that sense, the apparent increased interest in Burke, as William Cain

has recently argued, may indeed merely represent an American attempt to discover, ex post facto, domestic seeds for post-structuralist thinking. Cain writes,

> Particularly during the 1970s and 80s, we have heard a good deal of vague talk about Burke having 'anticipated' French structuralism and post-structuralism. Some readers want to give credit where it is felt to be due. Others, however, seem to believe that structuralism and its offshoots will be made less menacing, less disruptive of our critical habits, if their insights about 'language' and 'system' are located in Burke, the critic who has 'been there already.' If this leads to a rereading of Burke, it is worth encouraging, but not if it is simply another effort to dismiss or domesticate new modes of criticism (141).

Burke is indeed the critic who has been here already. And, although Burke may come to be interpreted as an anticipator of deconstruction, he is probably as unwilling a "founder" of indigenous American deconstruction as they are unwilling to being founded.

The possible use of Burke as, in essence, a conduit to import, and perhaps to domesticate, what might otherwise be perceived as foreign ideas would dramatize the simulatenous

centrality and marginality of Burke's work, for in popularizing Burke for the purpose of introducing and furthering the cause of another body of criticism, or conversely for damning and dismissing that body of criticism, Burke's system itself, even while popularized or demeaned, is effaced. From that perspective, Burke's writings are at once central and marginal. Although Cain may well be misreading the reasons for the recent surge in Burke's popularity, the fact that he advances such a reading in-and-of itself suggests the ambiguous, marginal status which Burke enjoys in the contemporary critical arena.

It is apparent that many critics are re-interpreting Burke through their own postmodern lenses, and they are finding that Burke may look very much like their own self-images. Given that Burke may be read as a postmodern deconstruction worker, the question remains, "What aspects of Burke's theory lend themselves to postmodern appropriation?" I have attempted elsewhere (1989) to suggest a fairly detailed answer to this question. In summary, my position is that Burke's focus on the antinomies of definition and the paradox of substance "infect" his system of dramatism with the seeds of deconstruction (Burke often uses the term "dissolution"). A Burkean reading of metaphysics thus reveals, in logological terms, that the Word is always already simply a word, that the spiritualized is always already material. But the Word does not <u>reduce</u> to a word, and the spiritual does not reduce to the material. Rather, we are kept spinning between them: the hierarchy does not simply reverse; it revolves.

The de-stabilizing, de-priveliging implications of Burke's theories are clearly deconstructive and postmodern. The postmodern is accentuated in Burke's love of irony, paradox, and -- incorporating both of these -- "perspective by incongruity." I have already suggested how perspective by incongruity is related to Dadaism, surrealism, and by extension postmodernism. The search for "perspective without obsession" is much like following the trace of meaning without a desire for a totalization of the meaning. If perspective by incongruity suggests parallels between Dada and deconstruction, those may be worth pursuing at a different time. (I cannot resist the revisionist impulse, however, toward an implied re-naming of Derrida as "Derridada.")

Booth, Lentricchia, Rueckert, Southwell, and many others have all noted significant parallels between Burke's works and the work of deconstruction and, by implication, postmodernism. While none of the writers just mentioned have tried simply to reduce Burke to postmodernism, or to "purify" Burke as a postmodernist, that possibility is ripe for exploitation, and no doubt someone will soon do it. But just as Burke did not fit comfortably in the mold of modernism, so too might he squirm in the "molten-mold" of postmodernism. Just as Burke is perhaps best read as something other than modern, so too might he be something other than postmodern, and yet, as we have seen, in many respects he is decidedly both modern and postmodern. In

this sense, I want to suggest not that Burke is caught in a tug of war between the modern and postmodern worlds, but rather that by in essence writing on the interrelatedness of the modern and postmodern, Burke's works "lay outside the jurisdiction" of both -- and in that limited sense may be beyond either.

IV.

Although some writers place Burke squarely in either the modern or the postmodern traditions, it has been my objective to show that Burke participates in both but is marginal to each. He is marginal to the modern tradition in that his methods are unstable, un-methodological, and his insights tend toward a demonstration not of order and coherence but rather of incongruities and transformations which "de-center" the structures. The "paradox of substance" may be a "representative anecdote" of this aspect of Burke's thinking. In these respects Burke may easily be interpreted as a precursor of deconstruction and postmodernism. Yet he remains a system-builder, even if -- like Derrida -- it is only a necessary prelude to demonstrating the inevitable instabilities and limitations of any system. And in system-building, there is always the possibility of a modernist reading which seals off the system and in its hermeneutics protects the system against its own deconstructions by simply ignoring them. Certainly some readers of Burke -- for example, those who employ the pentad as a clear-cut "method" --

have interpreted him in this modernist manner. More fundamentally, however, Burke's priveliging of ontology, even in his rhetoricized fashion, does seem to participate fairly directly in the traditions of modernism -- and it may be viewed as antithetical to the postmodern project.

I have suggested that in being neither purely modern nor postmodern, Burke is "beyond" each. What I mean by this is that Burke may be read as offering a "corrective" to both modernism and postmodernism. Specifically, by refusing to allow linguistic structures to rigidify (a risk implicit in the coherentism of modernism), Burke's approach is anti-ideological. His "deconstructive" methods dis-mantle ideological edifices, and he de-mystifies ideological deities. In this sense, Burke incorporates much of the political agenda of postmodernism; that is, he shares Lyotard's fear that modernism may be primarily responsible for the terror of the twentieth-century (81), and his "deconstructive" orientation is designed as a "corrective" to such ideological excesses. Derrida's deconstruction and postmodernism in general also move toward an embrace of anti-ideological indeterminacy; however, they have been accused of excesses of their own, of swooning with indeterminacy through a free-fall of nothingness into an abyss of solipsism and silence. It is against the potential over-determination of indeterminacy that I believe Burke offers an important corrective to postmodernism and deconstruction; specifically, as I have argued elsewhere (1989), Burke's

paradoxical and rhetorically strategic interpretation of human being, of the human subject, and ultimately of human ontology, provides a "molten grounding" for deconstructive criticism which fends off self-dissemination and self-immolation.

As what we might perhaps call a "postmodern ontologist," Burke offers voice to deconstruction; he privileges self-assertion even in a world of indeterminacy, and in doing so he preserves the prospect for political action which is not necessarily pre-ideological or incipient fascism. In doing so, Burke may respond in advance to criticism currently leveled at postmodernism. That is, the postmodern stance, often interpreted as "a progressive, point-by-point inversion of the modes of modernism" (just as Derrida is said to have "inverted structuralism"), may founder in the face of political and institutional recalcitrances. Thus, "the cultural carnival of postmodernism" may, much like the mayhem of Dada, marginalize itself through an anxiety of assertion and asservation (Morris, 346). While tilting joyfully against the illusive blades of metaphysical discourse, postmodern criticism may remain quiescently inconsequential in the cultural and political world. Robert Morris writes of postmodernists, "Whatever they have sought to delegitimize -- and according to some, the delegitimizing of every major metanarrative has been the postmodern thrust -- they have left untouched the institutions that support the dissemination of these enterprises. Whatever the discontinuities, . . . they follow modernism in confining

their critical combat to intramural affairs" (346). The orientation of postmodernism thus gives rise to questions of its efficacy as a cultural force. Morris asks, "And what difference have they made in the culture at large, resigned as they seem to be to a political quietism, commercial exploitation, and institutional docility?" (346). Similarly, deconstruction is typically charged with political quietism both because it problematizes the assertive and affirmative qualities of language itself and because it problematizes the self-assured voice of the human subject. While these charges may ultimately caricature rather than characterize the political and ethical orientation of deconstruction, it is in relation to these charges that Burke's deviation from the paths of deconstruction in particular and postmodernism in general is most apparent. For whatever else may be said about Burke, he is not quiet; he is not silent. Life, according to Burke, is a conversation, and it is a conversation of self-assured voices, of human subjects huddled nervously at the edge of the abyss yet, assertively and loquaciously, remaining marginal to the abyss.

Notes

[1] Burke's appropriation of Mead is admittedly much more complex than this discussion suggests. Burke does not omit Mead's "I," but the theory of identification concentrates on the rhetorical processes by which we not only constitute our individual "me's" but also those processes by which the various individual "me's" may become coalesced (or identified) in a corporate or nationalistic "we." I offer an expanded view of this process of identification in "Re: Reading the History of Rhetoric with Kenneth Burke."

[2] While this progression is a bit of an over-simplification, its general frame seems to offer a profitable structure from which to explicate Burke's theorizing. In a 1976 exchange with Wilbur Samuel Howell, Burke points both toward the progressive nature of his use of "rhetoric" as it relates to the development of Dramatism (62) and toward an implicit doubleness of meaning in his use of the term in Counter-Statement which might also allow him to claim that the entire progression was there all along, at least somewhat incipiently (63). See "Colloquy: The Party Line."

[3] Deconstruction is often interpreted as the last-gasp of modernism itself. This approach seems more influenced by the concept of the "modern" in art, in which the purification of a form was viewed as a "modern" initiative. Deconstruction can be viewed as a "purification" of linguistic forms in the sense that it "perfects" linguistic "playfulness." Eagleton, for instance, views some "of the later works of Barthes and Derrida" as "modernist literary texts in themselves, experimental, enigmatic and richly ambiguous" (139). However, given the more structural approach taken by Hyman to an understanding of "modernism" in literary criticism, an approach which sought coherence and implied a "center," deconstruction would need to be classified as an example par excellent of postmodernism.

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